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MAKING A RUG

In the second grade the undertaking in weaving for several years past has been a delightful coöperative problem. Once it was a banner to be carried on May Day. A proud white cock adorned the center of the green background, and the delighted weavers crowed lustily as they saluted their May queen. Again, when there was money to spare in the egg purse, the children bought a downy pillow and wove for it a pretty cover. This cushion is in daily use in the office, where mothers tuck it behind their backs when conferring with Miss Cooke, the principal, and at parties, where it helps make the big settle in front of the open fireplace cozy. Best of all, perhaps, at least in the eyes of some children, is its appearance on the stage at morning-exercise hour, whenever a play requires the use of such an article. This year we are making individual rugs for the baby group in the kindergarten to sit on when playing on the floor. But the article to be described in this paper was woven the first year we attempted the coöperative scheme.

That year the second grade decided it would be fun to surprise Miss Cooke with a new cover for her couch in the office, one that should be useful, durable, and as pretty as we could make it.

Such a problem was made possible by the work in the first grade, where the children's desire for individual ownership had been satisfied through the making of tiny rugs for individual play houses, and where some practical experience in weaving and in dyeing had been gained. In planning their rugs, each child had played with bright colors to his heart's content; boiling strawberries, dandelion blossoms, onion skins, etc., for dye materials, and using them without regard to their durability. The children therefore felt, when we began discussing plans for our new cover, that they knew how to make pretty colors. We decided, however, that a real blanket sometimes needed to be washed, and that it would not be pretty if its colors faded. The children offered to wash their rugs and bring them to school the next day. Many showed faded colors. Nearly all were woven unevenly. We wondered whether we could arrange these little rugs into one large rug.

We placed them on the table, side by side, and end to end, but the effect was very funny indeed, for no two were the same size; moreover, there were impossible gaps between the adjoining sides, and the designs, while very pretty as separate rugs, did not fit together at all when we tried to make a big one. The experiment, however, taught us several things to avoid.

But there remained many other points to consider, if we were to make a useful blanket; in particular, the size of the blanket, the number of parts into which we should divide it for convenience in weaving, and the kind of material we should use. Furthermore, there was the question of looms, and also the size of the loom, which depended upon the size of the different weaving sections; therefore, we had to stop and settle some mathematical difficulties. Finally, after three weeks of planning and measuring with ruler and yardstick, an outline, first roughly chalked off on the floor, was transferred to a large sheet of Manilla paper and hung up for reference.

Meanwhile, during the history periods, the children had begun their study of materials. They raveled threads from samples of loosely woven cloth, pulled the fibers apart, and, aided by simple sense games, identified each piece as wool, silk, or cotton. Then they further identified these fabrics, both in their clothing and in various household articles displayed for the purpose. At last they decided to use wool as their weaving thread, because they thought that clothes made of it were warmer than cotton, less expensive than silk, and more durable than either cotton or silk. One boy said: "If the cover is warm enough, Miss Cooke can use it in summer time for trips on the lake, or she can line her hammock with it and sleep out of doors at night."

The looms, when planned, were made in the shop; but just how they were made, how the colors were chosen, and how the yarn was dyed, are details told by the children in the following letters written to Miss Cooke after the cover was finished and just before it was presented.

The day the letters were written, the children planned in class what part of the story each should tell. Then they went by twos into the hall, where they talked together. On their return they wrote independently, but when the letters were finished, teacher and child together corrected English and spelling. The corrections made, however, were almost all in the spelling. (I make this explanation here, because the papers may appear surprisingly well expressed for children so young. This is due, I think, in part to the fact that throughout our school pupils are given unusual opportunities for free written expression, and in this grade particularly the children, for three or four months, had been making frequent written reports upon the chickens.)

Dear Miss Cooke:

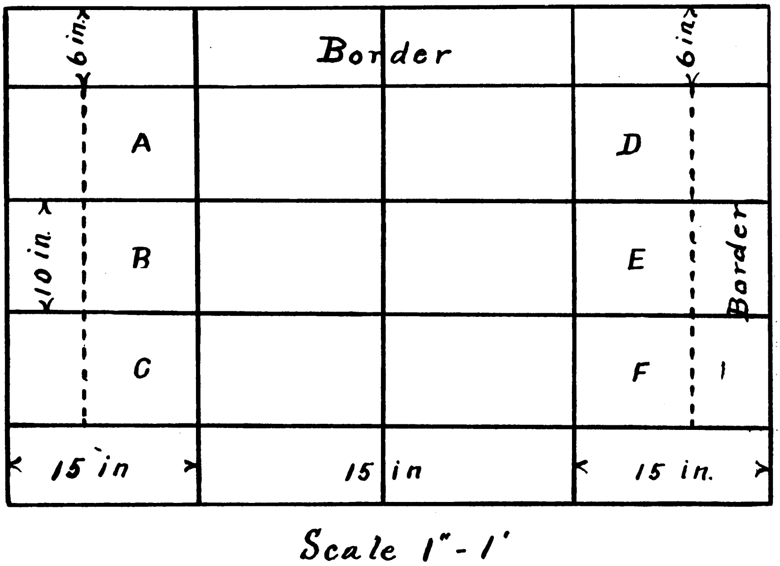
We slipped in your office to see the couch. We brought up the pad to measure it. I covered my mother with a shawl, so that we could see how big to make it. I found out what it would take to cover her. It took 5 feet long and 3 feet wide. We made ours 3 feet 6 inches so it would hang over and look nice. We did not put fringe on, because we thought it would tickle you.

EDWARD

Dear Miss Cooke:

We planned to divide the cover into 20 pieces, because there are twenty children in the room. We wanted each child to have a piece to weave. We thought the cover would look nice if we made a border and center to the cover. We drew some designs the size of the border. We decided that it would be best to have the border 6 inches wide. Each piece is 6 inches wide and 15 inches long. There are 12 pieces in the center. The pieces in the center are 15 inches long and 10 inches wide.

MARGARET



27. OUTLINE PLAN FOR RUG

Dear Miss Cooke:

We went down to your office to look at the colors. The colors in your room were brown, yellow, green, and tan. Miss Clements helped us to make some designs for the rug. We went down into your office again to see if your colors were like the colors we made. We found that ours were too bright and that the colors in your office were soft, so we made some designs again. We decided that the border should be brown, green, yellow, and the middle, tan.

JUNIATA

28. POURING WATER ON ASH HOPPER MADE BY CHILDREN

Dear Miss Cooke:

Miss Dewey helped me make my loom. First I took two pieces of wood and measured them both 17 inches long, and two others 12 inches long. The 17-inch pieces are sides. The 12-inch pieces are ends. We nailed the pieces together. The side pieces are 1 inch and ¼. The ends are 1 inch thick. Then I drew a line across the ends and made ½ inch dots. Then I hammered nails in the dots. Then I put a wire across the sides.

BARBARA

My dear Miss Cooke:

We made a rug for you. This is the way we dyed the colors. First we took the walnuts and took the husks off of them. Then each child measured 1 quart of walnut hulls and put it into 2 quarts of cold water and let it boil for 30 minutes. Then we took 4 ounces of white yarn and dipped it until it was a pretty tan color. Miss Larrabee helped us to dye.

LISETTE

Dear Miss Cooke:

I am going to tell you how I made ash lye for dyeing yellow. First I put straw in the hopper. Then I put ashes in the hopper. Then I poured water over the ashes. Then in 2 days it began to drip lye.

BARRETT

Dear Miss Cooke:

I would like to tell you how we made yellow dye. There are two ways of making it, one of which I will tell you. We boiled black oak bark and put some alum in it.

The other way: We put a straw or two in the bottom of our ash hopper; then poured water on it slowly. Copperas mixed with water makes copperas water. We dipped the yarn first in the lye water and then in copperas. (If it was not dark enough, we dipped it in another time. It looked green, but when it had dried it looked yellow.)*

Dear Miss Cooke:

This is the way we dyed our dark brown yarn. First we put 2 cups of walnut shells with 2 quarts of water and put it in a large saucepan. After that we put it on the stove and let it boil for a half hour. Then we put the walnuts in a large piece of cheesecloth and let it drain.†

The way we did our weaving: Each child made a loom. We strung our looms.**

The piece I wove is in the border. We started this piece of work the first of the year and just finished it. We have taken very much pleasure in making this and have woven our love in with the stitches.

With very much love from your dear friend,

STARR

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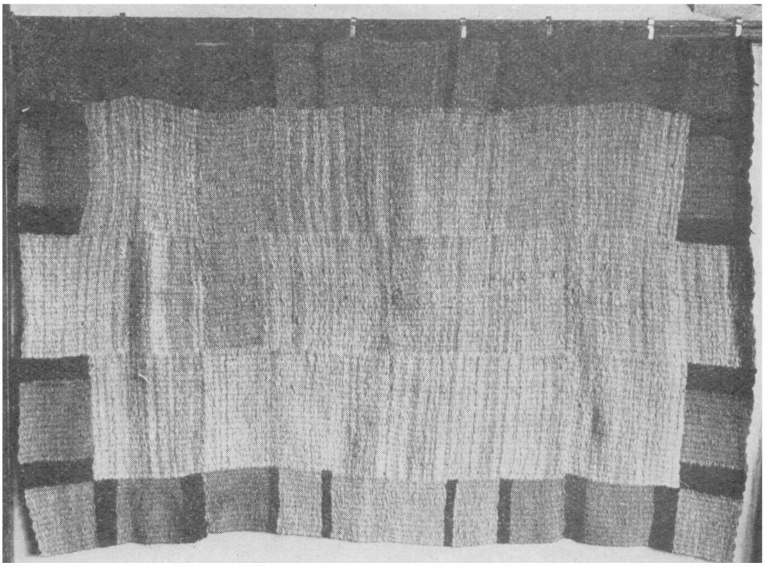
*If you first burn the copperas, as you would parch coffee, and proceed as above, the color made is a lovely dull orange.

†For this color the yarn was left in the dye over night; otherwise, it would have been tan.

**The warp was an extra-heavy cotton cord, bought of the Thomas Charles Co. We boiled it first to soften it and then dipped it into weak walnut dye to make it inconspicuous.

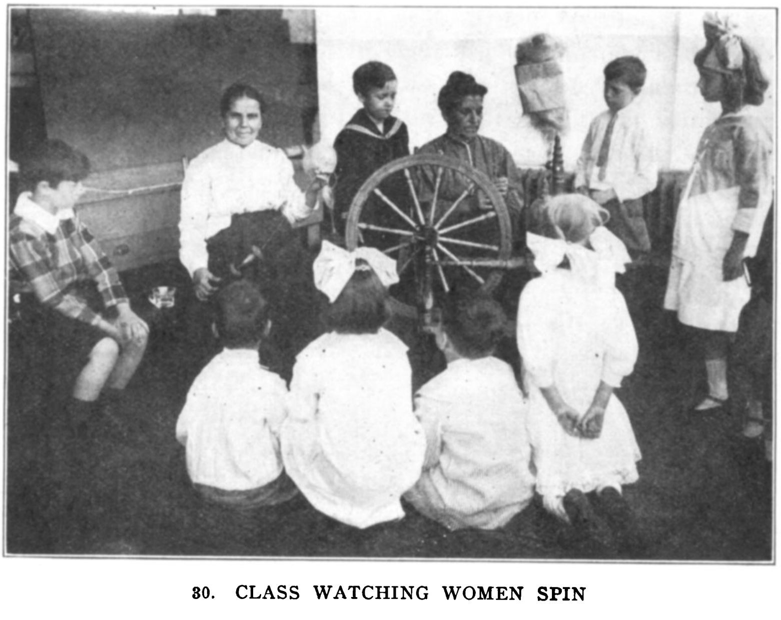


29. THE FINISHED RUG

The children's letters do not explain how the parts were put together. After the twenty sections were taken off their respective looms, the question was to connect them so that the seams would not spoil the harmonious, unified effect of the blanket. Finally I hit upon a method of interlacing these pieces that was simple enough for the children to do. Using a long weaving needle, threaded with warp, the child picked up first a woof loop of a border section, then one from a center section, and continued thus, interlacing back and forth down the fifteen-inch length. The wires on the looms had kept the weaving straight, so that there were no drawn or puckered seams when the child pulled his thread taut, and to our great delight, the woof loops slipped loosely and evenly over the lacing thread. As a result the rug had the pleasing appearance of having been woven on one big loom. Frequently, however, one section was woven a little more closely than another; that is, it had more woof threads than did the one to which we were lacing it. If this difference was slight, we now and then picked up two loops instead of one, but if there was a difference of a dozen threads, we ripped out the undesirable fullness. The twenty sections we began with were thus reduced to four, each 42 inches by

15 inches. At this point, my ingenuity failed me, and I sewed the three crosswise seams that united the four sections.

The children had kept this secret for nearly five months, and they felt that such a lovely gift should be fitly presented. One child suggested giving it to Miss Cooke at morning-exercise hour; another said, "No, let's do it when we give our party to the seniors;" but a more thoughtful child objected, saying, "Perhaps the seniors will feel bad because the blanket is not for them." This suggestion of a possible disappointment to another entirely cured their thirst for publicity. So with joyous spirits they carried out the following naïve plan. One child went for Miss Cooke; another met her at the door and blindfolded her; in silence two others guided her to the central chair in a big circle, where the class, on tiptoes, seated themselves. Then a little girl, who had begged this as a special favor, placed the big package, containing both the cover and the precious letters, on Miss Cooke's lap. Still another child loosened the bandage. From every chair a radiant little face beamed upon her, gleefully watching her untie the bundle. Soon each child proudly pointed out his own particular square. Miss Cooke had to read all the letters aloud, and with



30. CLASS WATCHING WOMEN SPIN

childish frankness they corrected her every time she made sly efforts to omit repetitions.

So it was in this happy way that the children finally realized the goal toward which they had worked. But my realization ran deeper still, for along with their weaving the children had caught a slight appreciation of the weaver's art, of its difficulties and possibilities, of some of the joys and sorrows of the primitive peoples who practiced the art. For instance, when the children first began weaving they were greatly hindered by the frequent breaking of their woof or weaving thread. Some colors seemed always breaking. At first I attributed these annoyances to the clumsiness of the weavers, but later, when the more skillful workers also complained, I suggested that we investigate the yarn. The children took up two threads of different colors and compared them. They found there was more twist in one than in the other. The better thread they next compared with a piece of our undyed yarn, and here, too, found a difference in strength and in the amount of twist. They remembered that some colors had been very troublesome to dye and in consequence had been redipped, washed and rinsed over several times. Then they decided that the repeated handling had worn the thread by separating the fibers and destroying the twist. These breaking threads* were causing the trouble.

The following day, a yarn better than carpet-woof was shown the children. They admired its strength and smoothness and wondered how it was made. I told them that long before Christ was born, people knew how to make beautiful threads. I also told them that when she was a young girl my mother had been taught the process and that they too could experiment, if they wished. I gave them a large sheepskin, from which they clipped off bits of wool. Immediately each child became an inventor. Soon an ingenious lad fastened his piece of wool to the drawer handle of his desk and, pulling and twisting with his fingers, produced a thread that would hang together fairly well. Another, failing in this method, tied one end to his pencil and with this as a weight twirled the other end between his palms, thereby surpassing the achievement of the first boy. Forthwith others improvised weights. At this point some primitive spindles were distributed, and their use explained. With one of these a little girl spun a fairly long thread, but like the poorer ones, this, too, untwisted the moment she laid it on her desk. "I'd try that again," said she, "if the wool wasn't so sticky. I hate the smell of it." A receipt for washing greasy yarn, worked out by a class two years before, was written upon the blackboard. Next day the class approved the efforts of the committee which had washed some wool after school. Our Greek janitor next showed the class how to use a pair of old-fashioned hand carders. Again they attempted thread-making. Though pleased with a better result, they were not satisfied. To have them observe skillful work, we visited Hull House Museum, where they watched an Irish and an Italian woman (shown in the accompanying picture) dexterously ply spindle, distaff, and wheel. For the third time the class experimented. At the end of half an hour, a boy dolefully exclaimed, "It looked awful easy yesterday, but I can't work the trick." So with increased respect and admiration for expert skill we ceased our effort.

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*This carpet yarn was bought at the Garden City Educational Co., 110 Wabash Avenue, and cost 60 cents a pound. I do not recommend this quality of material. Another year I got at the same place an excellent yarn at 90 cents a pound. It was, however, very greasy and had to be thoroughly washed before it would take the dye; but the superior quality compensated for the trouble of washing.

Meanwhile, the science period had been given over to a study of sheep raising. Miss Larrabee, with whom the children dyed the yarn, and Miss Dewey, who supervised the making of the looms, showed the class lantern slides illustrating various activities observed by them on a modern sheep ranch.

The following letter written to an absent child, after one of these talks, hints at the nature of the information gathered:

Dear Juniata:

We are studying about sheep. Miss Dewey showed us some pictures about sheep. She showed us how they sheared sheep. It took them 3 minutes to shear one sheep. Some men can shear a hundred sheep in a day.

CARL

In order to contrast and broaden their impressions, the children read stories about primitive shepherds; such as the nomadic Bedouins, the Navajo weavers, Persian dyers, Persian rug makers, etc., written by Miss Hall for our second grade. The following lesson, selected from a little group of stories on the shepherd in Greece, reveals the spirit of these reading lessons.

A LOST SHEEP

A shepherd stood on the mountain-side.
He was counting his sheep.
One was gone.
Across the valley was another mountain-side.
Here was another shepherd with his sheep.

The first shepherd called across to him.
He had to call very loudly and slowly, because it was far away.
He said, "I have lost a sheep. Is he with you?"
"I will see," called the other shepherd.
He counted his sheep.
There was one too many.
Now all sheep look very much alike.
How could he tell which one was not his?
The sheep all had their heads down, eating.
The shepherd gave his call.
All his sheep knew that call.
They raised their heads.
But one sheep kept on eating.
The shepherd shouted, "Yes, I have one strange sheep."
Then the other shepherd gave his call.
It floated softly across the valley.
The strange sheep heard it and lifted its head.
"He is yours," called the man who was watching.
Then the other shepherd left his dog to guard his herd.
He came across the valley and got his lost sheep.

Further to vivify their work in reading and literature, slides were shown of shepherds with flocks ranging the rocky hills of Palestine. These pictures, together with blackboard drawings, copied largely from Knight's "Song of our Syrian Guest," helped build a suitable setting for stories of Abraham, and David and Goliath, which were read to the children by Mr. John Merrill. The class also learned to love and to repeat a number of beautiful little shepherd poems, which they told to the school at morning exercise period, and later some of the loveliest ones they repeated again on commencement day.

Though the rug was woven to make one person happy, the spirit of the undertaking permeated every phase of the class-room work and even beyond, for through the giving of the shepherd songs and poems, the grade made its contribution to the larger social life of the school.

NOTE

As so many questions have been asked about the dyeing, it may be helpful to those who are interested, to print the recipes used in the second grade this year. We are also printing some of the home experiments. These were done upon the children's own initiative and before the class-room dyeing was begun, the motive being to see how many pretty colors they could make for the rugs they were to weave for the kindergarten. These experiments show how the interest in last year's weaving done by these children in the first grade carried over and gave a basis for this year's work, which takes them a step further by using mordants and a greater variety of vegetable dyes. Some of these experiments are repetitions of work done in the first grade, while others are wholly original.

HOME EXPERIMENTS

I dyed with preserved strawberries, but the color did not take. I boiled the cloth in the berries fifteen minutes. I dyed another piece of cloth in beets, but the color was not good. After the beets had boiled I put in the cotton cloth and some salt.

I made an experiment with jelly tablets that come in each box of Knox's gelatine. First I melted the pellet in hot water and then put in a piece of white cotton cloth. Then, after it had boiled five minutes I put in some salt. It made a pretty red. When I washed it, why, it faded to pink.

MARY

I made an experiment with onion skins. I boiled it five minutes. It turned brown.

JOHN

I experimented with grape juice. I put some woolen yarn in a pan. It turned purple. Then I washed it. But it faded.

JACK

Red

1 teaspoon damsons
1 cup water
1 lump washing soda

Boil about ten minutes. Then add wool yarn. Boil about one-half hour. Wash it, and it will fade.

Burnt Sienna

2 teaspoons blackberry jelly
1 cup water
1 lump washing soda

Boil about ten minutes. Then add wool yarn. Boil one hour. Wash until water is clear. It will not fade.

Gray

1 handful catkins
4 tablespoons water

Boil about ten minutes. Then add cotton material. Boil until water is used up. It will be a dirty gray. I did not wash it because it was so ugly.

ROBERTA

We are making rugs. I made some brown with tea and salt. I boiled it for five minutes. Then I left it all night on the stove. Then I brought it to school and washed it. And it didn't fade.

JANET

We are making experiments. I tried to make a brown dye with lavender leaves. It made a light yellow. I took one glass of leaves. I had three glasses of water. I put one teaspoonful of pepper to set it. It boiled fifteen minutes. It made a light gray.

I tried to make another brown with some sandal wood. I took two tablespoonfuls of sandal wood and a glass of hot water. I left the cotton cloth in the dye over night. The color was pink. It did not fade.

JACK

CLASS-ROOM EXPERIMENTS

Blue Dye

1 oz. indigo
½ oz. zinc dust
½ oz. lime

I ground the indigo. Then we sifted it. Then we added the zinc dust and one gallon of cold water. We added the lime. The lime was mixed with a little warm water. Then we let it stand 24 hours. We stirred it every little once in a while and skimmed off the scum. We washed the yarn. Then we dipped it in the dye until it was dark enough. Then we hung it up to dry. Then Miss Larrabee washed it.

ROBERTA

Yellow

1 tablespoon copperas
1 quart warm water

First wash the yarn in warm soapy water. Then dip yarn in lye water. Wring yarn well. Then dip yarn in copperas water. Wring yarn well. Then dip it in lye water again. Wring yarn well. Then let the yarn dry, and it turns yellow.

LOUISE

Orange

We burnt two tablespoonfuls of copperas. We had two pans. One had one quart of water. Another had one quart of lye water. Then we put our burnt copperas into the first pan of water. We washed our yarn and then put it in the lye water, and it turned yellow. Afterwards we put it in the copperas, and it turned green. We hung it up, and it turned orange.

ALICIA

Red

2 cups madder
¼ cup of alum
¼ cup of cream of tartar
7½ quarts of water
1 pound of cotton yarn

Wash yarn in soapy water and boil it one hour. Then wring water from yarn and put it into the pan of alum and cream of tartar and two quarts of water. Boil one hour. Then put the madder into the kettle of water. When the dye is hot, put in the yarn and keep it below boiling for fifty minutes. Boil hard for fifteen or twenty minutes. Then hang yarn up and wash it after it is dry.

JACK

Green

We took one-quarter pound of indigo blue yarn. We dipped it in the yellow dye. We dipped it in the dye about eleven times. It turned greener and greener. We hung it up.

TOMMY

Green

1¼ oz. fustic chips
¾ oz. logwood chips
2 tablespoons copper sulphate
1 lb. cotton yarn

We put the logwood, the copper sulphate, the fustic chips in a bag. We put the bag in about two gallons of water. We boiled the yarn one hour in soapy water before we put it in the dye. We boiled it in the dye until it got dark green. We let it dry over night. Then we washed it. It turned a lighter green.

FREDERICK

Brown

First of all I helped Jack measure two pints of walnut hulls. Then we tied the hulls in a bag. We got the water. I got two quarts, and Jack got two quarts, and that made one gallon. We put the bag in the water, and the walnut shells made the water turn brown. When the water was dark brown we put in the yarn. We boiled the yarn one hour. It stayed over night in the dye.

JESSICA

Turkey Red

1 tablespoonful diamond dye
½ tablespoon baking soda
2 quarts water
5 ounces yarn

We weighed our yarn, and it weighed five ounces. Then we washed it. We first wet our dye. Then we poured some hot water on the dye and stirred it. We strained it through cloth. Then we poured another quart of water on it. Then we put in our yarn. Then we boiled it a half hour, and it turned red.

ALICIA

Our experience has shown us that more satisfactory results are to be obtained from the vegetable dyes if one is dyeing wool; if cotton, one may get soft, pretty shades, but the results are less pleasing to the children. In order to satisfy their love for strong colors, we often use the aniline dyes. We recommend the use of these because of the difficulty of obtaining the vegetable dyes and also because one is more sure of good results and a wider range of color.